
19 Sept 2002 Project: **Yesler Community Center**

Phase: Schematic Design

Previous Review: 6 June 2002 (Pre-Design)

Presenters: Toby Ressler, Parks and Recreation
Roger Williams, Mithun

Attendee: Paul Fitzgerald, SHA
Rich Franko, Mithun
Deb Guentner, Mithun
Scott Kemp, DCLU
Tom Rooks, Mithun

Time: 1.25 hours

(SDC Ref. # 169 | DC00275)

Action: The Commission thanked the team for coming and continuing to involve them in this challenging project and would like to make the following comments and recommendations.

- The Design Commission respects the constraints and peculiarities presented by this project such as budget constraints, the surrounding community's varied desires, and adjacent property ownership;
- feels strongly that this project must set the future direction for a much higher density neighborhood and that this extremely valuable site will drive changes in this community;
- supports the direction of the street wall scheme as their preferred option;
- believes the west edge opens onto an important end of Broadway needs to be reconsidered as a public edge;
- feels that the proposed parking scheme is suburban and needs to be redesigned for an urban setting by, for example, having fewer spaces, excavating for underground parking, creating a multiple-use parking lot, or allowing parking to be appropriated for other uses as the neighborhood develops;
- encourages the proponents to continue looking at the more public east, street-facing wall of the gym and how that differs from the west side, which faces the courtyard;
- acknowledges that this is a place for children and encourages the team to make the interior gym space and childcare center reflect that it is a place for children;
- urges the team to further investigate how the south end of the site can be used for ecological functions as suggested by the proponents;
- urges the team to make the circulation connect visually and experientially to adjacent open spaces that will be developed in the future so as to set parameters for engaging these spaces;
- urges the team to define design principles that will guide the evolution of this project and its relationship to its context;
- approves schematic design with a strong recommendation that the team reconsider the parking and the plan configuration.

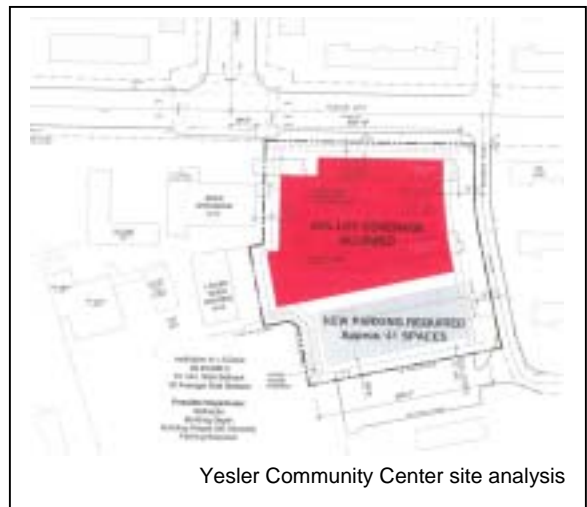
The original plan was to build a community center, housing, and parking on this site. The design team developed three schemes based on Parks Department's and SHA's programs. The client

agencies decided that none of the schemes—neither ground-related nor stacked alternatives—were satisfactory. The ground-related scheme produced urban design and architectural problems including creating a suburban rather than urban scale and severely limiting open space. With the stacked schemes, half of the housing units were too shaded, facing north into the trees and the number of units was minimized. These schemes also required that the community center be depressed 5' below Yesler, which would have created operational and urban design problems. A key factor in the rejection of the mixed housing and Community Center was the limitations imposed by the 30' height limit of the L-3 zones. In the end, the agencies and design team found that fitting all of the program elements on this site was a compromise and they wanted either excellent housing or an excellent community center.

The program has been reduced to eliminate housing from the site and retain the services—the community center and parking. The adjacent existing gym will be maintained through the construction of the new gym. SHA is no longer involved (although they are keeping the property to the west of the site) because their funding was going to come from the housing, so the site boundaries have changed. The new negotiated site is much smaller, but the program has not



Yesler Community Center site analysis



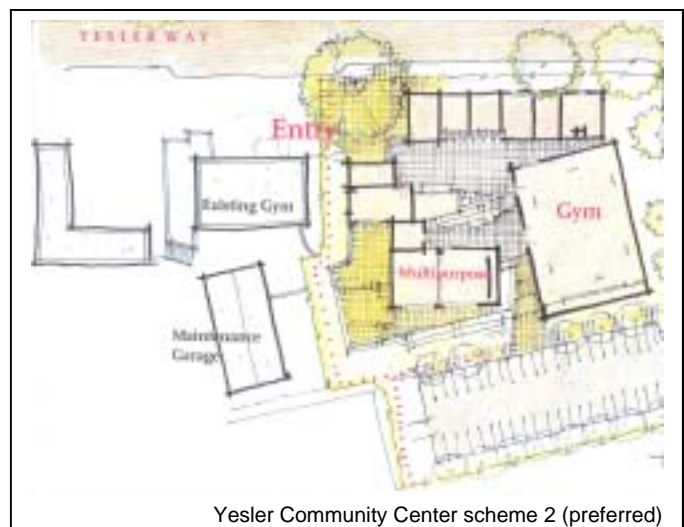
Yesler Community Center site analysis

changed.

The proponents developed two parts. Scheme 1 has a mid-block entry and a central axis. Scheme 2 has a diagonal entry into the central open space and a streetwall. In the future, this open space may connect with open space on the SHA property. Transparency is one of the main goals for the site: in scheme 1, this is addressed by have the building set back from the street; in scheme 2, it is addressed with a diagonal view into the central gym and open space. Having adjacent open space by the multipurpose room is important. In scheme 1, there is a terrace adjacent to the multipurpose room and the courtyard has southern exposure. In scheme 2, there is open space at the southwest corner of the site, also adjacent to the multipurpose room.

Having open space is a priority and parking is a given in both schemes. Parking is located in the lowest part of the site to facilitate and allow room for stormwater treatment. Treating the stormwater is a tradeoff—some open space would need to be sacrificed for ecological function. The goal is to consolidate the little open space that is left.

The design team's preferred alternative is alternative 2, the streetwall scheme. This plan



Yesler Community Center scheme 2 (preferred)

has open, defensible space in the southwest corner that has the potential for connecting with adjacent property. The future of the adjacent space to the west is unknown and this creates opportunities for a relationship to it. Alternative 2 also allows for opportunities for social space along the Yesler Way street edge. Yesler has good tree canopy and is a pedestrian scale, so it is a desirable social space. The street edge in front will remain porous. Along 10th, hardscape would be brought up to the building for seating, chess tables, and active zones; there will be ventilation at this side of the building, so hardscape also allows the space to be open and clear. To the south, there is 20' of space where trees would be planted for shade, reducing the need for air conditioning. At the south end of the site, a handicap ramp is integrated with the landscape.

Key Commissioner Comments and Concerns

- Recognizes that the site has shrunk, but feels that it is still necessary to know what SHA plans for the open space because in option 2, the site is closed off to the adjacent SHA property, while in option 1, it is more open to that property.
 - Proponents stated that SHA has looked at a number of options for developing their property including creating a very dense space, but they do not know for sure. Proponents further stated that they are struggling with deciding how much to open up to the SHA site.
 - An SHA representative stated that the future of their site is unknown—no master plan or anything beyond a preliminary plan has been made. They have not yet thought through how redevelopment will relate to this site.
- Believes that if development on the SHA site is a Hope VI development, it will probably not consist of highrise buildings.
 - Proponents stated that discussion are of a high-density development on SHA property—6 stories or more—but with stronger street relationships. The development would likely be of a size that would be shading and compromising view of this site.
- Believes it would be helpful if the design team along with Parks and Recreation and SHA could agree on clear design principles for future development. Would like them to define a few things that will inform work and help maintain the potential for a connection between sites.
 - Proponents stated that they have focused on the intersection at the northwest corner of the site as a potential connector and gathering space.
- Acknowledges that the proponents have recommended one diagram, the streetwall scheme, that relates better to future development. Believes that there is some ability for proponents to make future projects relate to the pattern that they start.
- Feels that there are broader planning issues that must be addressed. A directive of open space strategy is to enhance view corridors and create connections to open space. Suggests that a massive structure in this zone would create conflicting urban design issues. Supports the streetwall scheme and encourages proponents to emphasize the edge and set up a direction for future development.
 - Proponents stated that the diagonal entry scheme would do that because the southwest corner as the active, lively space. In addition, it defines the street edge nicely and allows for flexibility in the future and the possibility for space to be reconfigured.

- Feels that the design process has been driven more by physical design considerations than by the perspective of people's use and benefits from the facility. Believes that strengths of this project is the preciousness of the land and its location in a very urban setting, and feels that the proposals do not fit in this setting because they are suburban paradigms. Would like to work with proponents to help them lessen the parking requirements and provide more opportunities for the design and program.
- Would like drawings to show the property at the foot of Broadway as they have shown Yesler, even though it is not part of this site. Like Broadway, the uses along Yesler are very important to the presentation because they are the components that make it a community center.
- Would like proponents to look at the strength of the presence of children and the childcare center and the impact of those on the courtyard. Believes that the childcare center should have more of a presence on the courtyard at the intersection rather than at the back. Feels that the childcare center and gym should be more visible at the front as beacons for strengthening the community.
- Suggests that the team keep working on what to do with east side of gym. Realizes that it poses a challenge with it being on a downhill slope, but feels that it is an important edge.
- Believes that the parking should be brought closer to the building because the space in between is not useful. This provides more space for stormwater treatment and feels that losing open space for water treatment is a worthwhile tradeoff.
- Feels that the more this space opens up to its neighbors, the more the neighbors will open up to it. Believes that the potential 8' wall is intimidating and that the point at the southwest corner is too sharp. Would like proponents to ease up on that corner and possibly use the handicap ramp as part of the circulation system. Suggest that they think of the ramp as part of the stepping down of that slope rather than as being at the base of an 8' wall.
- Believes that proponents are building a neighborhood service center geared toward a neighborhood soon will not exist, the neighborhood will change. Feels that it is a suburban plan for a place that is becoming more urban. Would like these buildings to establish a design direction and be more urban because what we see now in the neighborhood will not exist in the future. Believes that if there is an 8' differential, perhaps the parking should be underground rather than at grade.
 - Proponents stated that some of the design decisions are based on financial constraints.
- Suggests that this plan is more than a gesture and that the team can define the edge of the site by terracing stairs, which establishes urban element between the properties. This provides access to the building, but also establishes a tone for the building and for the future. Believes that, although excavating and putting parking underground is expensive, it is the best solution.
 - Proponents stated that they are working with a \$4 million construction budget and there is \$6 million in levy money. They looked at a parking structure early on, but in addition to cost issues, there were security concerns in the community.
- Recognizes the proponents have these constraints, but feels that the Commission is here to push the envelope. There is movement to reduce parking in the city and surface parking will be more expendable later. Within the future context of a densely redeveloped neighborhood, feels that the edges need to be further explored. Believes that the gym edge will be

uncomfortable because across the street will be highly-developed housing.

- Would like to know if it is possible to just cut the parking in half.
 - Proponents stated that it would be helpful for the Commission to exert more pressure on city agencies to think downstream and push the envelope on issues like parking requirements.
- Feels that designers need to provide the ammunition, i.e., show a significantly better design with half the parking.
 - Proponents stated that this is a catch-22 and that these are great ideas, but in reality they are futuristic thoughts. Further stated that the community does not want to lose any parking.
 - Proponents stated that they could explore densifying the courtyard, having open space around the community center, and getting rid of some parking.
- Believes that if the existing tree on Yesler are to survive, proponents must minimize the paving over the roots.
 - Proponents stated that they have looked into it and that is the most porous side.
- Believes that there are issues with parking, but also with the west edge. Would like to see more connection looking out and see it defined as a public edge. Realizes that this may be a stretch as the big gym belongs to someone else, but would like to see the plan look to the future. Feels that the preferred alternative can be adjusted to do that.
- Would like proponents to make the west edge more open, create a smaller footprint for parking, and provide better experiential conditions relative to the SHA site.
- Would like the team to treat the edge along Yesler as if it were high density.

Key Visitor Comments and Concerns

- A DCLU representative stated that the project is going to Council for several departures, so it is possible for them to seek exceptions to the parking code. The parking spaces are based on what the project needs, but these do not necessarily need to be on site. Alternative solutions could be building them on SHA property; making the lot grass and to be used as parking only for big events; or making the lot basketball courts to be used as parking when there is demand.

19 Sept 2002 Project: Blue Ring Strategy

Phase: Discussion

Previous Reviews: 16 May 2002 (South Lake Union Streetscape Briefing), 4 April 2002 (South Lake Union Streetscape Briefing), 20 Sept 2001 (Open Space Strategy Briefing), 17 May 2001 (Open Space Strategy/Westlake Corridor South), 5 October 2000 (Open Space Strategy Briefing)

Presenters: Lyle Bicknell, CityDesign
Robert Scully, CityDesign

Attendees: Dennis Meier, CityDesign
Eric Tweit, SDOT

Time: 1 hour (SDC Ref. # 592 | DC00184)

Summary: The Commission appreciates the overview of current work on the Blue Ring Strategy and would like to make the following comments and recommendations.

- **The Design Commission feels that there was not enough time during this session for sufficient dialogue or for a complete look at the project and would like the team to come back;**
- **would like the team to present the following three facets of the project in their future presentations: 1) a review at the conceptual level; 2) the South Lake Union piece, especially Terry Avenue; and 3) the implementation strategy and a look at the coordination of existing and future projects; and**
- **would like to raise the importance of the transportation aspects of the project.**

CityDesign staff presented the current work and thinking, in addition to planned future phases of the Blue Ring Strategy. The Blue Ring Strategy is a vision and implementation strategy for a connected system of publicly accessible open spaces in Center City including parks, plazas, streets, and shoreline. Ten neighborhoods make up Center City, which is an expanded area from the original Downtown urban center. The strategy tries to look at gaps in planning—some area plans are more developed than others. With the South Lake Union plan, they intend to take the Blue Ring Strategy to the next level of detail.

In creating the Blue Ring, the team looked back 100 years to the “Green Ring” that was proposed by the Olmsted brothers and has been partially implemented. Most of the Olmsted brothers’ work took place in the periphery areas, leaving a gap in Center City. The Blue Ring focuses on bringing open space to the center of Seattle. The 100-year plan for the 21st century is to:

- connect neighborhoods
- link major civic amenities
- bridge gaps
- use water as a placemaker
- illuminate urban watersheds
- capture important views

The draft Blue Ring Strategy now consists of two documents: 1) the 100-year Vision describes the concept for linking public sites of regional significance and sets up a hierarchy of connections, 2) The Next Decade proposes an implementation strategy for the next 10 years, a project guide, and mechanisms for implementation. Some of the key projects and sites for the Blue Ring are the waterfront, King Street Station, South Lake Union: Park and Neighborhood, Westlake Avenue, stadiums, and the library and civic center. A public presentation on June 25th

elicited many comments including a desire for more emphasis on parks and questions as to how the strategy will affect neighborhoods, where community gathering spaces will be in neighborhoods, and how the use of streets will be balanced. This led into the next phase of working, beginning this fall.

Current activities include:

- creating site selection and design guidelines for public parks and private plazas
- identifying opportunity areas for sub-area planning, such as South Jackson St.
- identifying neighborhood gathering places
- defining the scope for sub-area planning through discussion with SDOT and other DCLU Planning Group members
- working with InterIm and their consultants to find out where CityDesign and the Blue Ring can help and intersect with the International District urban design plan
- collaborating with SPU on a workshop to present and discuss tangible aspects of Westlake Avenue streetscape design with property owners, developers, and other community members in the Denny Triangle
- looking at other neighborhoods for sub-area planning such as Belltown, First Hill, Denny Triangle, and South Lake Union

The South Lake Union sub-area plan is in the northeast corner of the Blue Ring. The 9th and Terry green streets are being implemented and South Lake Union Park will act as the portal to this area. The majority of the property is owned by Vulcan or the City, which affords some opportunities. With regard to land use, there is a pocket of light industrial zoned land right in the center, which specifically excludes housing. There are also a lot of landmarks in the area, many of them churches. The team sees Mercer and Westlake being the important connecting corridors—Denny is too narrow and has difficult topography and Fairview has too much traffic. The Potlatch trail will be somewhere in this zone.

The project is being done in phases, with Phase I starting in 2003 and calling for work near the new Vulcan development, the new Cornish School, and south of the South Lake Union Park site. Phase II will occur in 2004–2006 and will consist of projects like Westlake Avenue. Phase III is slated for 2007 onward.

Changes in the streetscape of Westlake north of Denny are being proposed. The street itself could become a two-way street with diagonal parking and the proposed streetcar in the northbound side and one southbound lane accommodating parallel parking. This new configuration allows for wide sidewalks. Terry Avenue will undergo changes, as well. Because it is wider than the standard right-of-way, a woonerf design has been proposed. This would include bollards and street trees that define the pedestrian realm. The east side of the street would be curbless and much of it would be brick. The team has worked with Vulcan engineers on the design for this street.

Key Commissioner Comments and Concerns

- Would like to know if there is a plan to do anything with the street alignments east of Fairview.
 - CityDesign stated that there are no plans for that in the short term.
- Believes that the proposed changes to Westlake Avenue is a contentious issue.
 - CityDesign stated that there are a few vocal people opposed to the proposal because they do not want a two-way street, however this is not the majority.

- Recognizes that the diagram shows Westlake as a major street, but Terry is visually a major street. Would like to know why there is not more emphasis on Terry.
 - CityDesign stated that both streets need emphasis, but in different ways. They cannot both have continuous retail on both, so there is continuous retail just on Westlake. Terry will serve more as a pedestrian mall.
- Suggests that because these are all drafts at this point, the team reconsider orientation and emphasis. Now it reflects more attention on South Lake Union and certain parts of downtown, but would like more attention given to SODO and the stadium district. Suggests that more documentation should be done even if it is cursory. Believes that if the City documents address the need for pedestrian design in these areas, it will make a better case for WSDOT.
- Advocates that the Commission treat CityDesign projects differently than they do at present. With the current method, the Commission is not given time to provide thoughtful comments and contributions to the work.
- Believes that a more precise process than a casual information presentation is necessary between the Commission and CityDesign projects.
- Feels that the Commission needs another session on the Blue Ring Strategy at the conceptual level and that something is presented to the Commission every month to keep them up to speed.
- Believes that transportation issues are currently the big, driving issues and would like to look at the Blue Ring with an equal level of importance because other projects fit in as pieces of the Blue Ring.
- Points out that the previous project (Yesler Community Center) is on the Blue Ring, but it is being designed without looking toward the Blue Ring.
- Feels that there needs to be a recommendation at the city level that the Blue Ring and other strategies are part of their vision and be made city policy.
- Feels that there are three facets of the project that the Commission would the team to come back and present: 1) a review at the conceptual level; 2) the South Lake Union public realm, especially Terry Avenue; and 3) the implementation strategy and the coordination of existing and future projects.
- Believes that the team should keep focusing on the vision and the implementation will happen in pieces.